

**USDA Forest Service
Smokey Bear Ranger District
Lincoln National Forest**

DECISION MEMO

FOR

**Grindstone Mountain Bike Trails Project
T.11S, R.13E, Sections 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33**

I. DECISION TO BE IMPLEMENTED

A. Decision

It is my decision to approve the construction of approximately 16 miles of trail located in T11S, R13E, Sections 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33 on the Smokey Bear Ranger District. The trails will establish recreational opportunities including mountain biking in the Grindstone area. The Grindstone area holds perfect topography and size for a front country, multiple skill level, stacked-loop trail system. Informal parking and trailhead services are already in place for approximately 25 cars at the Grindstone Lake access area, which also includes numerous portable restrooms. The Lake and Grindstone Mesa are the two focal areas and the proposed trail system offers numerous views of both as well as incredible vistas of Sierra Blanca from the top of Grindstone Mesa. The Grindstone area was first evaluated in an Environmental Impact Statement for the reduction of hazardous fuels. The EIS conducted analysis for ground disturbance associated with the treatment of the area. The Grindstone Mountain Bike Trail Project will follow the design proposal submitted by the International Mountain Bicycling Association and will incorporate all the best management practices and design features and mitigation measures outlined in the Perk/Grindstone EIS.

No new parking lots or road construction will occur as a result of this project.

B. Purpose of Decision

The purpose of the Grindstone Mountain Bike Trails Project is to increase recreational opportunities in and around the Village of Ruidoso. The abundance of sustainable mountain biking trails around the Smokey Bear District are minimal. However, there has been recent interest from local groups including the Village of Ruidoso to increase the infrastructure for mountain biking.

Desired Condition – The overall desired condition is to develop a sustainable infrastructure for mountain biking that can support an increase in frequency and duration of use.

Existing Conditions – The current lack of mountain bike trails has resulted in the illegal construction of non-sustainable trails that are now causing resource damage.

LAW, REGULATION, AND POLICY CONSISTANCE - The Grindstone Mountain Bike Trails Project area is part of Management Area 1I, as defined by the Lincoln National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The Lincoln Forest Plan (1986, as amended) provides that Management Areas 1I has a primary emphasis on developed recreation. Based on this Forest Plan guidance, the Grindstone Mountain Bike Trails Project will meet all current Forest Plan standards and guidelines. Furthermore, the purposed action will adhere to all current guidelines for all threatened and endangered species.

II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

The proposed project is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. This project falls within one of the categories identified in 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1) *Construction and reconstruction of trails*.

A. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

This action does not involve any extraordinary circumstances. Therefore, this action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Extraordinary circumstances include, but are not limited to, the presence of steep slopes or highly erosive soils; threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat; flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds; congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness; wilderness study areas; or National Recreation Areas; inventoried roadless areas; Research Natural Areas; or Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

- Steep Slopes- The project will contour all steep slopes which will prevent the loss of soil due to erosion.
- Highly Erosive Soils- There are no highly erosive soils within the project area however the project will address soil erosion by installing erosion control structures such as water dips or leadouts.
- Threatened and Endangered Species- A Biological Assessment and Evaluation was completed for the project with a finding of No Effect.
- Flood Plains- The project is located within a flood plain however the addition of erosion control barriers will aid in controlling water flow while maintaining water quality.
- Congressionally Designated / Wilderness / Inventoried Roadless Areas- There are none located within the project area.
- Native American Religious or Cultural Sites- A archeological report was completed for the project with a finding of No Effect.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

On September 20, 2010 I, Adam Mendonca, scoped the Grindstone Mountain Bike Trails Project by discussing the project with staff from the Smokey Bear Ranger District. Included in the discussions were Eric Turbeville-District Recreation Staff, Larry Cordova-District Wildlife Biologist, Adam Mendonca-District Planner, George Douds-Acting District Range, and Christina Thompson-Zoned Reality Specialist. There were no concerns expressed during the meeting regarding the project. All specialist felt that there resource areas would not be affected by the project. No additional scoping was conducted.

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The proposed action is consistent with the Lincoln National Forest Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for the protection of forest resources. The project is in conformance with Forest Plan Management Areas 1I.

A Biological Assessment and Evaluation was completed September 28, 2010, for this project, finding "no effect" to Threatened or Endangered species.

An archeological report was completed September 28, 2010 for this project, finding "no effect" which satisfies all requirements for Section 106 consultation for cultural resources. Any new sites located during implementation will be fully avoided and the forest archeologist will be notified.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is not subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215.12 (f).

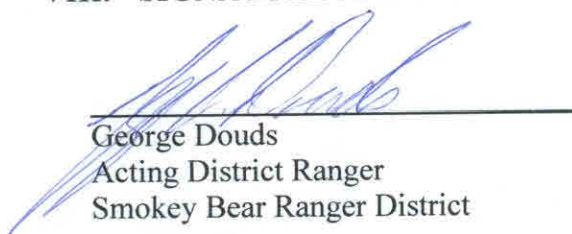
VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented immediately.

VII. CONTACT PERSON

Further information about this decision can be obtained from the Smokey Bear Ranger District during normal office hours (weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at 901 Mechem, Ruidoso, New Mexico, by Phone: 575-257-4095, by Fax: 575-257-6174; by mail 901 Mechem, Ruidoso, NM, 88345, or by e-mail: George Douds at gdouds@fs.fed.us. For additional technical information, please contact Eric Turbeville at the Smokey Bear Ranger District, or by calling 575-257-4095.

VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE


George Douds
Acting District Ranger
Smokey Bear Ranger District

09/30/2010
Date

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